

PostScript

BOOK REVIEWS

Occupational industrial and environmental toxicology, 2nd edition

Editor in Chief: Michael I Greenburg (pp 829, £65.00), 2003. London: Mosby. ISBN 0323013406

This is the second edition of a book which first appeared some seven years ago, to which has been added a number of new chapters. The format is standard for each chapter, starting with a description of the occupation, the likely toxicological exposures, sometimes broken down by specific areas, health effects, and a section on remediation. The book is aimed at the practising physician rather than the specialist in the field and although there is plenty of information here for the former, the latter, I think, is more likely to turn to more advanced sources of information.

My initial reaction to it was one of attraction. The use of archival photographs is interesting and intriguing, although one has to say that this significantly lengthens the book because of the generous use of space and, therefore, presumably ups the price (although at £65 for over 800 pages this is not an expensive volume). And better numeration of the photographs throughout the book would have made reading easier. As far as content is concerned, some of the chapters have achieved their targets well—for instance the chapter on dry cleaners gives a balanced view of the workplace hazards before moving on to the toxicology and health outcomes. The chapter on commercial fishing is a very useful review of the numerous hazards of fishing. In other chapters the progressive approach does not work so well, such as that on painters, which is rather brief. Contributions on rectification are variable and if the physician turning to this book wants to find ways of remediating particular exposures, then on many occasions they will find themselves frustrated. I left this book in our departmental coffee room and asked for comments from anyone who felt inclined to put forward an opinion. Overall their feelings matched mine that while this was a useful source of information we would more probably turn to more detailed volumes.

There are a number of minor points which also tend to frustrate. For the British non-occupational physician there are a number of

Americanisms (for example, using joiners for solderers) which might confuse. The spine on my copy had started to disintegrate within two weeks of arrival. The layout of references at times is generous of space; in one chapter (that on painters), they are incorrectly numbered. Despite these carps I am quite pleased to have it on my bookshelf as an additional source for some areas, but it is not a book I would have gone out and bought myself. I would also be happy to point our undergraduate and Master's students in its direction (although perhaps not to buy for themselves).

J Ayres

Atlas of occupational health and disease

Nerys R Williams and John Harrison (£55), 2004. London: Hodder Arnold. ISBN 0340740698

This book caused me to question the assertion that a picture is worth a thousand words. The use of illustrations in Agricola's *De Re Metallica*, carefully annotated and described as they were, would undoubtedly have aided comprehension of his descriptions of preventive measures in an era when such concepts had become unfamiliar, and all well trained occupational physicians should know of the influence on Parliament of the illustrations in the report of the Children's Employment Commission in 1842. We were all introduced to reading via picture books, and well chosen illustrations still enhance the value of many texts. Only relatively recently however has the concept of "atlases" of illness and disease become popular, led by those specialties where pictorial illustration is essential, pathology (including haematology) and dermatology. Presumably the financial success of such works and the superficial appeal of the product have led publishers to expand the concept into areas where illustration is less useful, and I await an atlas of psychotherapy (maybe there is one).

Occupational medicine is a field in which illustration should be useful. Why did I find this book unsatisfactory? After all, we teach the importance of visiting a workplace to see for ourselves what people do, a fundamental aspect of our practice, and we take our

cameras with us to record what we see so that we can teach others. But when we do this, we describe the dynamic of work captured in that instant snapshot at some length. Two problems are noted by the authors in their introduction—the difficulty of finding sufficient suitable pictures and the apparent need to confine their text to 150 words per picture. Thus many of the illustrations are barely or inadequately described and some of them are of little more interest than holiday snaps—photographs of a mountain, a parrot, a florist, or a bronzed lifeguard, for example. The ones of workplaces often only serve as a loose connection to text about a disease that might occur in such a place rather than what the picture actually shows. And occasionally the caption is wrong—for example, a radiograph of a hydropneumothorax and mesothelioma is described as a pleural effusion.

Of course, there are some very good and interesting pictures of the sort of things you would expect—skin diseases, blood films and some radiographs, some workplaces. and one thing I had not seen before, argyrosis of the eyes. But who would find this book good value at £55? I don't honestly know.

A Seaton

NOTICE

International Conference on Health, Occupation and Environment, Industrial Toxicology Research Centre, Lucknow, India, 1–3 November 2004

The forthcoming International Conference on Health, Occupation and Environment in the Unorganised Sector; Problems and Roadmaps will be held at the Industrial Toxicology Research Centre, Lucknow, India during 1–3 November 2004.

Details of the conference are available at the Industrial Toxicology Research Centre website: www.itrcindia.org/ichoe2004.

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